

Headline: Libyan Activists Welcome Posting of YouTube Rape Video

By Danielle Derohannesian

Libyan feminists a few weeks ago posted [a video](#), which was quickly taken down, on YouTube depicting a rape of a young female student of Benghazi University. The video was meant to spread awareness on the issue rape in Libya. Women are often treated as if they are to blame and are accused of being complicit with the rapists. Furthermore, the crimes of the men are covered up to protect their reputation. Ultimately, activists wanted to spark discussion on the problems concerning rape victims, hoping to improve the promotion and protection of women's rights.

Women have been a silent force in the revolution that overthrew the late Muammar Al-Gaddafi and the rebuilding of the new state. On the [day of the Declaration of Liberation](#) last October (2011), the chairman of the governing National Transitional Council (NTC), Mustafa Adbeljalil, did not mention the role of women in the revolution and said that polygamy would be reinstated. At the first women's rights conference after the downfall of Al-Gaddafi last November, Abdeljalil participated and unlike the previous month, he noted the importance of the role of women and was eager to hear their suggestions, saying, "We expect women to be important figures in the future of this country." He listened and responded to questions, explaining that he did not actually support polygamy and stressed the importance for women's involvement in the new government. Among requests at this meeting were new laws that would protect women from violence, promote equality, and guarantee access to justice, health care, psychological support, and participation in politics.

According to the Constitutional Declaration that was in place during Al-Gaddafi's regime, there are legal restrictions on polygamy. However, the Sharia law that is the basis of the transitional constitution permits polygamy. When first declaring polygamy would be legal, [Abdeljalil cited Sharia law](#). Of course, he retracted what he said shortly after, but this indicated the troubles facing women's rights. There is not a clear division between religion and state yet, and as the NTC is forming a new government they are testing those boundaries. Libya has [ratified](#) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Maputo Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, both which promote the equality of women. Libya is therefore is expected to, if not legally bound to, follow them.

The release of the video reminds us that there are cultural, traditional, and religious contexts underlying women's rights in Libya. It means that there will be many obstacles along the way. In much of Europe and North America we can forget that women's suffrage, women's rights and equal opportunity (that may or may not be sufficient) is relatively new and took a while to achieve. In search of securing similar rights, activists in Libya are turning to new ways to raise awareness. Whether the means of releasing a video of a rape justifies the ends of changing women's rights is

debatable. Was it distasteful? Was it even necessary? What is certain though is that women will continue to voice discontent until they are fully satisfied. It is exactly this type of progressive discourse that will generate change.